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RESPONDING TO A FRENCH PASSION? SUPPLY AND READING  
OF HISTORICAL WORKS IN PUBLIC LIBRARIES  
(1860-1914)  
(Summary)

*Keywords:* history of reading, public library, history of France, cultural policies, social representations.

The network of public libraries provides a wide array of historical readings, which account for a tenth to a fifth of the catalogues as loans. As the example of Victor Duruy shows, these works are not necessarily driven by popularisation, as one would expect *a priori*. On the contrary, they are more likely the outcome of various “prescriptions” of a more or less official nature. They provide a set of books to read, the authors of which are recommendable by their notoriety or position and less by their appetite for historical popularisation. Such a supply of books clearly shows the will to suggest or even enforce some ideal library, a particular type of reading, to which readers are less likely to adhere. They are more interested in biographies and books about the Revolution, the Empire or the War of 1870. They appreciate the history of France but are less concerned with the ancient period. The most borrowed books – penned by Thiers, Barante, Duruy, and others – do not pertain to the historical popularisation category. As a matter of fact, in these public libraries, the reading supply and the readings per se do not follow a “popular” pattern. Ultimately, it is not surprising for a sociology of readers that is no longer popular.

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